

Georgia State Senator Sally Harrell also testified about how the bill was rushed through—this restrictive voting bill—through the Georgia Legislature without meaningful debate.

We heard about the provisions of the bill that basically say that non-partisan—that is already required, and that is correct—nonpartisan volunteers can't even give voters water when they stand in line, despite the fact that there were voters that we heard from the day before, with Senator MERKLEY and Stacy Abrams, and those voters stood in line for 3 hours, for 4 hours, and for 7 hours.

We heard about the runoff changes. The runoff used to be 9 weeks in Georgia. It was reduced to 28 days. And during the runoff period, you can't vote, under the new law, on Saturdays and Sundays. You can vote that way during the general election. All of this—all of this—is done, in the words of one North Carolina judge, many years ago, in a decision, who said: This law discriminates with surgical precision—literally going through ways that people voted, literally noticing that 70,000 new voters registered during the runoff, and then banning that because you have to register now 29 days ahead, when the time for the runoff is 28 days. How obvious can you get?

Where you live and what your ZIP Code is should not dictate whether or not you can vote for President or U.S. Senate or Congress or Governor or any election. We owe it to the people of this country, and to those across the country who stood in line for hours to cast a ballot, to take action and protect the fundamental right to vote.

I know a little bit about that because, in my State of Minnesota, nearly every single election has the highest voter turnout in the country. And guess what. We have elected Republican Governors with those rules that allow for more people to vote and the highest voter turnout. We have elected Democratic Governors, and we have elected Jesse Ventura. What I have noticed is not who wins, given that we are the only State in the country that has one State House that is Republican and one State House that is Democratic, given that our congressional delegation in the House is split evenly and has changed over time. It is not really who wins. It is how people feel about elections. They are part of the franchise we call democracy.

So they will come up to me and say, "You know, I didn't vote for you, but whatever; you are doing OK," or "I have this concern." But they feel like they are part of the action. That is what our goal should be, to have all Americans feel like they are part of the action.

We must meet this moment. As President Biden said in Philadelphia last week, this is the "test of our time." So what do we do? Well, first, we must pass the For the People Act, which Senators SCHUMER and MERKLEY and I introduced, along with many oth-

ers, to ensure that all Americans can cast their ballot.

It is nothing radical. You know why it is not radical? It is firmly based in the Constitution. On the basic voting rights, the Constitution literally says that Congress can make or alter the rules and the manner in which Federal elections occur. That has never been questioned. It has been affirmed time and time again.

The other bill, the bill we are focused on today, Congressman Lewis's bill, that is the Voting Rights Act, and you restore the Voting Rights Act after a Supreme Court decision struck down parts of that bill. I didn't agree with it. I agreed with then-Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's dissent, but you fix it with the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

It is now Congress's responsibility—the Supreme Court decision made that clear—to restore and modernize the Voting Rights Act and provide the Federal Government with the necessary tools to combat the assault on Americans' right to vote. We must recommit to the original goal of the Voting Rights Act to end discrimination in voting in America. We know this is something, historically, until recent years, that brought everyone together. The Senate reauthorized the Voting Rights Act in 1982 by a vote of 85 to 8, including 43 Republicans; in 1992, by a vote of 75 to 20, including 25 Republicans; and in 2006—2006—with a unanimous 98 to 0 vote, including 51 Republicans. And I don't think anyone with a straight face can say: Well, the reason we don't need to do this anymore is that we don't have any discriminatory laws being enacted on the State basis or there aren't any laws being enacted that limit voting.

Truly, maybe you should read some of the court decisions, if you think that.

I would say there is a stronger argument to do this, both sides of the aisle. John Lewis's bill is so important, and it isn't a substitute for passing the For the People bill, but we must do that, as well as include election infrastructure funding in the reconciliation bill, which I believe will be coming our way soon.

I will end with this. Last Sunday, I had the privilege of attending services at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, where I got to hear Reverend WARNOCK. There was a guest preacher, but for me it was like he was also preaching. And I got to hear him say something I will never forget. He said this:

A vote is a prayer; it's a prayer for a better world, a prayer for your kids' education, a prayer that you're going to finally be able to do something about this world's environment.

So during the last election, we saw an unprecedented number of people go to the polls to do just that. Not every one of their candidates won, but they believed enough in our democracy, in the middle of a public health crisis, that they went and cast their vote.

In Congressman John Lewis's words, "The right to vote is precious and almost sacred, and one of the most important blessings of our democracy." Today, we must be vigilant in protecting that blessing.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

EXPRESSING SUPPORT FOR THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. BRAUN. Mr. President, I rise here today to give emphasis to something I think is very important—it has been done basically annually—and that is talking about our Pledge of Allegiance. It is an expression of patriotism and commitment to our great Nation.

The United States is a symbol of freedom around the world. It is a beacon for "the land of opportunity."

Today, let's reaffirm our allegiance to the United States. I urge my colleagues to pass this annual resolution that simply expresses support for our Pledge of Allegiance.

This resolution was first raised by Senator Tom Daschle back in 2002 and passed without objection. Now, nearly 20 years later, this resolution is probably more important than ever.

We have seen countless attacks on our flag and the values it represents. The American flag is a symbol of hope and perseverance across the world. Whether in Cuba, Hong Kong, or Venezuela, those suffering under tyrannical regimes proudly wave the American flag in protest.

The U.S. Senate must stand in support of the Pledge of Allegiance, one of our most powerful expressions of national unity.

Mr. President, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 309, submitted earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 309) expressing support for the Pledge of Allegiance.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. BRAUN. I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The resolution (S. Res. 309) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

Mr. BRAUN. I yield the floor.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

POLICE DEPARTMENTS

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss facts and fiction. Recently, FOX News reporter Peter Doocy asked White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki about a Biden administration official's claim that Republicans have defunded the police by not voting to pass Biden's wasteful \$1.9 trillion stimulus bill. Ms. Psaki doubled down on the idea that it is Republicans and not Democrats who want to defund the police.

When a White House Press Secretary gives a press briefing, you expect some spin. You expect some verbal bobbing and weaving if the topic is unflattering to the administration. But when Jen Psaki tried to blame Republicans for defunding the police, it wasn't spin. It was horse manure. It was gaslighting.

For over a year, Democrats and left-wing activists have been calling over and over and over again to defund the police. And many Democrat-led city councils and Democrat mayors have done so, cutting and even slashing police budgets. As a result of those reckless policies, we are seeing a deeply concerning wave of violent crime in American cities across the country.

The chief White House spokesperson blaming Republicans for defunding the police is like an arsonist showing up at the fire and blaming the firemen. It is like the Chinese Communist Party blaming America for the Wuhan virus. It is like OJ saying he is going to help find the real killer. It is absurd. It is ridiculous. And Democrats know it.

Let's look at the facts. Democrats have called explicitly to defund the police for over a year and have been successful in doing it. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio, a Democrat, last summer pledged to cut the NYPD budget by \$1 billion, and then he did so. New York City passed a budget that did indeed cut \$1 billion from the police department.

Just a couple of months ago, de Blasio was forced to backtrack. He realized what a terrible decision it had been because now he is working to reverse it.

AOC, the darling of the extreme left-wing, has said: "Defunding [the] police means defunding [the] police" and "The fight to defund [the police] continues." There is not a lot of ambiguity in what AOC is saying.

And she is not alone. How about Representative RASHIDA TLAIB. She has called for "no more policing." Stop and think about that for a minute. This is an elected Democratic Member of Congress whose policy objective is no more policing. Those are her own words.

How about Representative ILHAN OMAR. She has said: "You can't really reform a department that is rotten to the root." An elected Democratic Member of Congress describing police departments as "rotten to the root." Again, those are her words.

And then there is Representative AYANNA PRESSLEY, who has introduced legislation to defund police officers in public schools. And she has said that defunding the police is about "true reparations." Well, maybe this is just a few fringe Democrats in the House of Representatives. Maybe it is not a broader policy of the Democratic Party.

What about Joe Biden? Uncle Joe can't possibly support defunding the police, right? Well, if you thought so, you would be wrong because Joe Biden nominated two of the leading advocates of abolishing the police—Vanita Gupta and Kristen Clarke—to senior positions at the U.S. Department of Justice. One of them is the No. 3 official at the Department of Justice. The other is the head of civil rights at the Department of Justice. Both had written, as recently as last year, explicit calls for defunding the police, and they got rewarded with helping run the Department of Justice.

But surely, you might say, even if Joe Biden gave in to the activists and nominated these folks, there are Democrats in this Chamber who would say defunding the police is too much; let's not go that far. Well, if you would say that, you would be wrong because both of those nominees, two of the leading advocates for defunding the police, were confirmed when every single Democrat in this Chamber voted to confirm them—100 percent.

The next time you see a Democrat describing themselves as moderate, reasonable, not one of those crazies saying things like "defund the police," maybe you should ask them why they voted to confirm two of the leading advocates for defunding the police to senior positions at the Department of Justice.

Democrat-led city councils all over the country are following the same game plan, and they have voted over and over and over again to defund the police. Last year, the Los Angeles City Council cut the police budget by \$150 million. Portland cut \$15 million from its police budget. Minneapolis cut \$8 million from its police budget. Seattle cut its police budget by 18 percent.

Now, what do these city have in common? They are run by Democrats. It is Democratic politicians who are slashing police budgets. And what have the results been? Well, sadly, these Democrat-led cities are reaping what they sowed. Crime rates are skyrocketing. The New York Times—hardly a right-wing outfit—the New York Times has reported that homicides in Los Angeles increased 36 percent, that homicides have increased in Portland more than 82 percent, and that homicides in Minneapolis increased nearly 72 percent last year. By all appearances, these homicide spikes will continue throughout this year.

Just a few weeks ago, Democrats demonstrated that they couldn't learn from the tragic failure of other cities that had slashed the police and seen

homicides skyrocket. What did they do in Oakland, CA? The city council voted to cut over \$18 million from the police department, and Oakland has already seen a 90-percent increase in homicides over last year.

The New York Times has also reported data showing that in 2020, homicide rates increased more than 30 percent in big cities. So far, they are increasing again this year.

According to the Guardian, some preliminary data showed that there were 4,000 more murders in 2020 than there were in 2019—4,000 men, women, and children who would be living, breathing, living their lives, raising their kids, contributing to the diverse tapestry of our Nation if it were not for the radicals slashing police budgets because of extreme ideological commitments and unleashing these crimewaves.

Now, Democrats know that the politics and the policy of defunding the police aren't working for them, which is why they are desperately trying to backtrack and blame and gaslight Republicans. Yeah, yeah, it is the Republicans who are doing this. Sure, sure, that is the ticket.

Not only did some Democrats blame calls to defund the police for close races that they lost in November and for the razor-thin Democratic majority in the U.S. Senate, they also know it isn't popular with the American people. A recent USA TODAY poll found that only 18 percent of Americans support defunding the police, and a large majority of African Americans don't support defunding the police. The same is true for Democratic voters. A large majority of Democratic voters don't support defunding the police. But in defiance of the interests of their constituents, Democrats continue to go down that road. The facts are that Democrats have repeatedly called to defund the police, and they have done so—this isn't a theory—they have done so in many cities.

Crime is rising, and radical Democratic policies have had deadly consequences. Not only have homicides risen, but there were more law enforcement officer fatalities in 2020 than there had been in 46 years. In 2020, 264 law enforcement officers tragically died in the line of duty, some from COVID-19 as a result of being first responders and others from getting shot while on duty.

After Jen Psaki blamed Republicans for defunding the police, Peter Doocy asked her to name the Republicans who said they were voting against the American Rescue Plan—the massive leftwing spending plan—that had nothing to do with the police. It was shoveling a lot of money to liberal special interests. It was giving money to State and local governments. So the White House argument was, well, some of the money to State and local governments could theoretically have gone to police, so therefore, if you don't vote for the massive trillions of dollars in spending,